



# Wild Land and Wildlife

## CAITHNESS & SUTHERLAND



Courtesy of Northshots



### Day 1

Leave Inverness on the A9 heading north. For a scenic diversion, head across the Black Isle towards the picturesque village of Cromarty and take the summer ferry across the Cromarty Firth to Nigg. The ferry runs from May to September. Keep your eye out for bottlenose dolphins which are regularly seen in the Firth.

From Nigg, follow the B9175 and rejoin the A9 heading north. Good places for breaks are Loch Fleet and Helmsdale. At Latheron, the road bears left to Thurso across the Causewaymire, an expansive peat bog, home to sphagnum moss, sundew and red deer. Just after Mybster, stop at Achanarras Quarry which is world-famous for the fossil fish that are found there. The fish lived in the Devonian period about 380 million years ago.

### Day 2

Today is a day of cycling (or walking) around Loch More, a truly wild place. By car, turn off the A9 at Mybster, and travel southeast through Westerdale on the B870. Pass Strathmore Lodge on the left and continue to the head of the loch, bearing right just before the fishing lodge at Lochmore Cottage. Park your car in the area just before the cattle grid. From here, there is a 20 mile cycle or walk along good forest tracks, keeping an eye out for golden eagles and red deer. The spectacle of Loch More with Morven, the highest mountain in Caithness (2315ft) in the distance is magnificent. On reaching Altnabreach station, bear left, pass Loch Dhu and continue to Dalwinnan. Bear left again to complete the circular route. It is easy cycling throughout but make sure that you have a map and compass and prepared for changes in the weather.

### Day 3

Let someone else do the work today by taking a boat trip out in the Pentland Firth. The turbulent Pentland Firth is home to a wide variety of species and the rocky outcrops and promontories along the coastline provide ideal ledges for nesting seabirds. Whales, dolphins, puffins and other seabirds are commonly seen during the summer and if you're lucky you may spot orca which are seen from May onwards.

If you have time when you get back, visit Achvarasdal Woods (grid reference NC 983 649). Just off the A836 heading west, this site with its network of all-ability paths is a great place to spot spotted flycatcher, twayblade orchid, common hawkler and meat-eating sundew.

### Day 4

The wild and rugged north coast of Scotland is fantastic for wildlife watching. Head west on the A836 with fabulous views over the Atlantic. The dune grasslands at Strathy Bay and Strathy Point are rich in rare plants, including the rare Scottish primrose. From the cliffs you can enjoy watching seabirds and cetaceans.

Continue on to Tongue Bay where you may see seals and waders such as dunlins, redshanks and herons. Head south on the A836 and Ben Loyal, the 'Queen of Scottish mountains' comes into view. Travel down to Altnaharra and if you have time go along the shores of Loch Naver on either the B873 on the north side or to Klibreck on the south side. You'll need to double back and continue south on the A836 through Strath Vagastie to Lairg.

From Lairg either take the A839 to Balblair Wood and on to the A9 south, or continue on the A836 through Bonar Bridge and the Fairy Glen at Spinningdale and then to Clashmore to join the A9. Either way you will be rewarded with magnificent scenery and wildlife watching opportunities.

#### Crossing the Flow Country by train is a fabulous trip to take...

The sprinter train leaves Inverness and travels along the coast to Helmsdale after which it turns inland and stopping at remote stations such as Kildonan and Forsinard. Watch out for the red deer, eagles and otters. Stop off at Forsinard and enjoy a walk at the RSPB reserve and visitor centre where there is the dubh lochan trail. Alternatively you can disembark at Altnabreach and walk down to Halkirk.

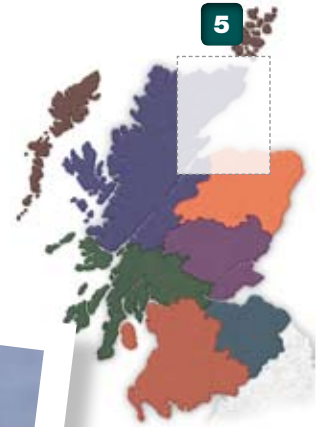
#### WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
1 Bottlenose dolphin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2 Common hawkler							✓	✓	✓			
3 Common seal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4 Golden eagle	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5 Grey heron	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6 Orca (killer whale)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
7 Puffin				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8 Red deer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9 Twayblade orchid					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
10 Scottish primrose						✓	✓	✓				



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Courtesy of Martin Webb

## ROUTE STATISTICS

**Length** 4 days / 3 nights  
**Mode of transport** Car  
**Start/finish** Inverness

Organisations not shown on the map are either regional initiatives or run holidays to the area, but are based elsewhere.

### 1 DUNNET HEAD EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Small charity promoting the Dunnet Head area.

**Tel: 01846 851774**  
[www.dunnethead.co.uk](http://www.dunnethead.co.uk)

### 4 NORTH HIGHLAND TOURISM

Tourism association for the North Highlands.

**Tel: 07970 027741**  
[www.northhighlandsscotland.com](http://www.northhighlandsscotland.com)

### 5 ORCADIAN WILDLIFE

Wildlife watching holidays on Orkney and Shetland.

**Tel: 01856 831240**  
[www.orkadianwildlife.co.uk](http://www.orkadianwildlife.co.uk)

### 2 ECOVENTURES

Wildlife watching boat trips from Cromarty on the Moray Firth.

**Tel: 01381 600323**  
[www.ecoventures.co.uk](http://www.ecoventures.co.uk)

### HOLIDAY COMPANIES

**C-N-Do Scotland**  
Tel: 01786 445703  
[www.cndoscotland.com](http://www.cndoscotland.com)

**Heatherlea (Scotland)**  
Tel: 01479 821248  
[www.heatherlea.co.uk](http://www.heatherlea.co.uk)

**North West Frontiers**  
Tel: 01997 421474  
[www.nwfrontiers.com](http://www.nwfrontiers.com)

**Scottish Cycling Holidays**  
Tel: 01250 876100  
[www.scotcycle.co.uk](http://www.scotcycle.co.uk)

**Speyside Wildlife**  
Tel: 01479 812498  
[www.speysidewildlife.co.uk](http://www.speysidewildlife.co.uk)

**Wild Green Travel**  
Tel: 0131 4786500  
[www.wildgreentravel.com](http://www.wildgreentravel.com)

**Wilderness Scotland**  
Tel: 0131 6256635  
[www.wildernessscotland.com](http://www.wildernessscotland.com)

**Wildoutdoors**  
Tel: 01350 727201  
[www.wildoutdoors.info](http://www.wildoutdoors.info)

### 3 RED KITE TOURS

Wildlife tours throughout the Highlands with wildlife guide, Jonathan Willet.

**Tel: 07740 216595**  
[www.redkitetours.co.uk](http://www.redkitetours.co.uk)